THE LORD'S PRAYER

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PREFACE

Meanings in Gospel discourse are formulated in the Holy Spirit and therefore with enduring value and a view to eternity.

Every teaching, parable, story and description, as well as every phrase, every word and every "detail" contained in the Gospel of Christ is of greatest depth and significance. These are not exhausted by a mere superficial interpretation, the most our own poor spiritual measure can conceive.

This is also true of the God-given prayer known to us as "Our Father", which the Lord Himself gave to His Church as an example of prayer for all of us.

Our Holy Fathers lived the Gospel of Christ. They kept His holy commandments. Their life, their discourse became extensions of the Gospel, and their experience in the Spirit of God enriches the holy Tradition of the Church. They reveal the great depth of the saving words of the Lord Christ and prove that His commandments "are not heavy", but can be applied by Christians in any age, and thus they keep control over our lack of faith, neglect and sloth.

With our old and modern Holy Fathers as interpreters of the Lord's Prayer, we investigate and touch its depths, directing it to the Lord.

We beg Christ our Saviour to give His Grace to us contemporary Christians, too, so that our life in Christ may be inspired and blessed by the prayer - as communion with the living God. But also that, vice versa, our prayer may be an expression of the living

presence of God in our life and may have its source. In other words, that prayer may be our life itself, which again will deepen and inspire the words which we direct towards our Holy God.

March 1997

Our holy Orthodox Faith is not one of the ideologies or the philosophies or even one of the religions of this world.

The God of the Orthodox is not the god of the philo-sophers, that is to say, an idea or a highest, impersonal principle or a religious value, to which we are elevated beginning from the lowest values.

We, the Orthodox, believe in a personal God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This Trinitarian God reveals Himself to us through His second person, that of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Son of God becomes man, our Lord Jesus Christ, preaches the Gospel, performs miracles, is crucified, is resurrected from the dead, ascends into heaven and sends the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. All this, in order to unite us with our God the Father, to restore our disturbed relationship with Him and to bring us to a personal meeting, communion and union with God.

Since God is personal, we can not meet Him except through the affectionate relationship with Him which prayer cultivates. If God was an idea, we could meet Him through logical evidence.

A sermon delivered by the Abbot of our Holy Monastery, Archimandrite George, on the Second Sunday of Great Lent in 1990 at Saint Dimitrios Church in Thessaloniki.

"Pray and love God in order to know Him", we can say to someone who is searching for God.

Through prayer, the unapproachable God becomes approachable. The unknown God becomes known.

The strange God becomes familiar and a friend.

This is the path that Theanthrope (Godman), our Lord, showed us. The Lord Jesus Christ often prayed, "leaving behind an example, that we should follow in his steps".

He taught that we must pray with humility, with forgiveness and with patience. He also left behind a model, an exemplary prayer familiar to all Christians, the "Lord's Prayer", the "Our Father".

The value of this prayer is invaluable to us.

First of all, because it was given by God.

Secondly, because our Most Holy Mother of God, the Apostles, the holy Martyrs, the holy Fathers and the pious Christians of all ages have prayed and have been sanctified by it.

Thirdly, because it summarises the whole Gospel and all the doctrines of our Faith.

According to Saint Maximus, "This prayer contains a petition for all things that the Word of God caused with the emptying of Himself during the Incarnation and it instructs us to seek just those things that only God the Father, through the natural intercession of the Son, truly grants in

the Holy Spirit. These gifts are seven: 1. Theology, 2. adoption through the Grace of God, 3. equality with the angels, 4. partaking in the eternal life, 5. restoration of the nature that impassively turns to itself, 6. abolition of the law of sin and 7. abolition of the tyranny of the devil who reigned over us with deception" (Interpretation of the "Lord's Prayer", Philokalia, published by "Perivoli tis Panagias", vol. 2, p. 253).

This prayer is the pre-eminent prayer of the Church. In the daily Church services it is recited sixteen times, during Great Lent twenty-two times. Furthermore, it is, in a way, a summary of the Divine Liturgy.

For this reason and with our Holy Fathers as my guides, I have considered it useful in this sermon to invite you to examine thoroughly and to take pleasure in this prayer's divine and saving meanings, so we recite it with greater zeal and consciousness.

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN

The Lord's Prayer begins with this invocation. The Lord teaches us to name God, Father.

Father, because He is our creator and maker, the granter of being, of life.

Father, because for us Christians He is also the granter of well being, of the adoption which He gave us through Jesus Christ. Before Christ, due to our apostasy from our heavenly Father, we were not only separated from Him, but we were, also, His enemies. Jesus Christ, the Son of God the Father, by nature, with His incarnation and His crucifixion, reconciled us to God the Father and made us His children by Grace. With Holy Baptism, we received the grace of adoption. Thus we became brethren of Christ, who is the first-born amongst many brethren.

Therefore He is Father because He grants us life; and not only life, but His life in Christ.

As Saint John Chrysostom writes, "He who calls God, Father, confesses through this sole appellation, deliverance from sins and retraction of hell and righteousness and sanctification and redemption and adoption and heritage and brotherhood to the Only Begotten Son, as well as to the granting of the Holy Spirit "(John

Chrysostom, Treatise to Matthew, homily 19, Greek Fathers of the Church, vol.IX, p. 668).

Addressing as "Father" our All-Holy God and Almighty Creator of everything, we confess what He has done for us, His unworthy children, and mostly what He has done for us through our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. Thus, the invocation "Father" brings us close to the Trinitarian God.

Saint Maximus the Confessor writes, "Justly the Lord teaches (those who pray) to promptly start from theology. He also introduces us to the mysterious way of the Cause who created all beings, He who is actually the cause of all beings. Because the words of the prayer contain the revelation of the Father, of His name and of His Kingdom, so that we learn from the very start to respect and worship the Trinity in One. Because the Only Begotten Son is the name of God the Father, with substantial hypostasis. And the Holy Spirit, with substantial hypostasis, is the Kingdom of God the Father (Ibid, p. 256).

His infinite love and charity allow and impel us to name Him our Father.

The mind of the pious man is amazed.

"Who will give me wings like the doves, according to the psalm?", Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes, "so that I am able to ascend over all things perceptible by the senses, over those that are

changed and altered, to ascend over to the Unchangeable and Unalterable, and with an unmoved and unwavering state of soul to dwell in Him first with my will and afterwards to invoke Him, with the very familiar invocation and say "Father"! What soul must have he who has spoken to God? What boldness? What conscience?" (At Prayer, Homily 2, Greek Fathers of the Church vol.VIII, p. 43).

Great and priceless is the gift. As many times as we want, we can address God and call Him our Father.

Still, when the Christian is rendered worthy and perceptibly receives the Grace of the Holy Spirit, then he feels in his heart the paternity of God and his own sonship. He feels filial and tender love towards God the Father. He feels like an affectionate son of a loving Father.

The Holy Spirit Himself cries out in our heart, "Abba, Father", creating this tender love towards God. "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His son to our hearts, shouting, Abba, Father".

In accordance to the image of our heavenly Father, we men can also become true spiritual fathers or fathers of the flesh. Saint Gregory Palamas teaches that we do not name God the Father in accordance to earthly fathers, but we name men 'fathers' in accordance to the image

of God the Father, "...after whom, according to the great Paul, all fathers in heaven and earth are named" (Discourse II against Grigoras, par. 69).

If the earthly fathers reflect the Grace and the blessing of the heavenly Father, they are true fathers as well. Without this Grace, they are not true and genuine fathers and they can not offer anything essential to their children. When men are estranged from the heavenly Father, they can not become genuine and proper fathers.

How many people suffer today because they did not have a true and loving father!

A heterodox Christian, who came to Orthodoxy, said that he had become Orthodox because only in Orthodoxy did he find spiritual fathers, a gift that no longer exists in western Christianity.

I remember the case of the Romanian writer, Virgil Georgiou, who, as he himself mentions, saw in the face of his poor but holy father (a priest) the face of God. This vision never let him stray far from God during his stormy life.

When we address God, "Father", we acknowledge His paternal concern for us. We are not orphans. We are not alive because of some fate or blind destiny. We are creatures of His love and we are constantly under His paternal attendance and care. His guiding and remedying love can be seen even behind life's hardships.

Saint Cosmas the Aitolian reminds us of God's paternal love: "And first of all our duty is to love our God because He granted us such spacious land to temporarily dwell in, so many thousands-myriads herbs, plants, fountains, rivers, wells, the sea, fish, air, day, night, fire, the sky, stars, the sun, the moon. For whom did He do all this? For us. What did He owe us? Nothing. All these are gifts. He made us human beings and not animals. He made us pious and Orthodox Christians and not impious and heretics. Even though we continually sin, He feels compassion for us like a father does and He does not put us to death in order to place us in Hell, but He awaits with open arms for our repentance. He awaits for the time when we will repent and stop doing evil deeds and do good, confess, amend ourselves, so that He will embrace us, kiss us and place us in Paradise where we will rejoice forever. Such a loving God and such a loving lord and master should we not also love and if need be shed our blood a thousand times for His love, as He shed it for our love?" (Teachings of Cosmas the Aitolian, I. Menounou, Athens, p. 152).

Therefore, a feeling of security that banishes every feeling of insecurity and anxiety, emanates from the faithful invocation of our God as our Father.

It is a great honour for us to call God, our Father, but also great is the responsibility for us who must become worthy of our heavenly Father. Let us recall our Lord's words, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6, 36). "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5, 48).

Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite writes on this subject, "For this reason our Lord instructs us how to pray to our Father by Grace, so that we are always protected under the grace of adoption until the end, that is to say, to be God's children not only by the rebirth and the baptism, but by our labours and deeds, as well. Because he who does not perform spiritual acts, but performs satanic ones, is not worthy to call God his Father, but instead the Devil, according to the word of our Lord, "Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye do" (John, 8, 44), that is to say, in relation with evil you are born from your father, the Devil, and you love to act according to the evil desires of your father. The Lord orders us to name Him our Father. To inform us firstly, that we were truly born children of God with the rebirth of the Holy Baptism and secondly, that we must preserve the signs, that is to say, the virtues of our Father and not be ashamed somehow of the relationship we have with Him" (About continual Communion, Athens 1887, p. 24).

OUR

It is characteristic that our Lord teaches us to address God not only Father, but as our Father, not my Father. Thus, he deters us from a selfish relationship with God. There is God and we, not God and I. Thus our heart 'embraces' all our fellow men who are by nature our brethren, due to our common origin from God, the Father. Our heart also embraces all Orthodox Christians who, due to our common faith and common birth from the same spiritual 'womb' of the Church, the Holy Font, are in addition our brethren by Grace and by Spirit.

How can God be your Father, if you do not accept your fellow men as your brethren, especially those of the same faith?

"The Lord teaches us", writes St. John Chrysostom, "to pray for all people, to mention in our supplication about the common body and not to pursue at all our personal interests, but on every occasion to pursue the interests of our fellow man. Thus, man avoids hate, he bridles imprudence, he emits envy, he brings about love, the mother of all goods, and he exiles abnormality of human things and shows that the equality of rank between the king and the poor is very great, since we all partake in the same greatest and the

most necessary gifts of our God.

By accepting to be called Father of us all, He gave to all of us the same noble origin, and consequently equality. Thus, we are united and no one possesses more than the other, neither the rich from the poor, neither the lord from the slave, neither the ruler from the reigned, neither the king from the soldier, neither the philosopher from the barbarian, neither the wise from the illiterate one" (ibid, p. 669).

As we shall see further on, the rest of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer help us overcome our morbid individualism, our self-centredness, and our selfishness. They help us open our heart and offer ourselves to God the Father, and to our brethren. That is to say, they help us to obtain love towards God, which is inseparably linked to benevolence and brotherly love.

WHO ART IN HEAVEN

The All-Holy God is our Father, but also the only Father in heaven. Saint Chrysostom explains, "When the 'in heaven' is said, we don't confine God to heavens, but instead, the worshipper is elevated from the earth and fixes his attention to the higher places and residences" (ibid, p.668).

So, the phrase 'in heaven' signifies the holiness of God the Father and not the residence of the everywhere present God.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa theologizes, "Since the distinction between the divine and the human is not local, therefore we need not some trick or some device to transport this heavy, fat and earthly body to the immaterial and intellectual conduct. But because virtue is intellectually separated from evil, it depends upon the human will to belong where he (man) wishes" (ibid, p. 51).

Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite provides us with the practical and moral consequences of this phrase, "Because our Father is in heaven we too must intellectually be in heaven, there, where our homeland is, the Higher Jerusalem, and not have our mind, as the swine do, down here on the earth. Our mind must be in our sweetest Saviour and Master and on the heavenly beauties of

Paradise. Not only in time of prayer but always and at all times we must keep our mind on heaven, so that the mind is not dispersed down here on perishable and temporary things" (ibid p.28).

HALLOWED BE THY NAME

This is the first petition of the Lord's Prayer. 'Hallowed' means 'glorified' according to Saint Chrysostom.

Of course, the Uncreated God has no need to be glorified by His created creatures. Nevertheless, He wants us to glorify Him because this benefits us men.

He protects us from the danger of glorifying ourselves with a fake glory that does not belong to us. Selfishness gives birth to ambition.

We are set correctly in the world when we glorify God, recognizing God as worthy of glory, because He is the Creator, the Father, the All-Holy, the Saviour, the Alpha and the Omega, and the Centre of the world, while we are His creatures who exist and live because He so wills.

You deceive yourself when you glorify yourself. When you glorify God you realize your nature, your destination. That is to say, you realize that you are not the centre of the world, that you are not the source of life and holiness, that you are not infinite and immortal on your own. In other words, you accept your limitation.

Men cannot glorify God when they glorify themselves. This is what happened to our Fore-

fathers. This is what happened to the teachers of Israel, whom the Lord speaks about in the Gospel according to John, "How can ye believe, when you receive honour from one another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" (John 5, 44). This is what happens to our contemporary, humanistic philosophy which wants man to be the centre of this world. The beliefs of the humanist man are summarised by the French atheist, J.P. Sartre, when he says to God, "When You exist, I can not exist. It is either You or me".

Nevertheless, according to Saint Gregory Palamas, man is truly glorified when he glorifies God. He is glorified when in God he can become not independent from God, not a pseudo-god, but he can become a god by Grace, infinite and everlasting.

The recent political developments in Eastern Europe have revealed once again that, when men deny praise to God, they deify some man whom they worship as god. The idols though, are destroyed and those who deny praise to God are in chaos.

Moreover, the man who denies praise to God is, in the end, surrounded by the misery of unspeakable passions and evil acts, instead of glory.

Christians can contribute to the glorification of God, when they live a holy life. Let us bear in mind the Lord's words, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5, 16).

On the contrary, when we do not live according to God's will, in whom we believe, "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through us." (See Romans 2, 24). That is why the prayer "hallowed be Thy name", according to Saint Chrysostom means, "render...us worthy to live purely, so through us all glorify you" (ibid, p. 672).

According to the same Saint, to set our clean life as an example to all, is a perfect philosophy, so that everyone who sees us will ascribe to the Lord a glorification for that (ibid).

The name of God is glorified when Christians, incessantly, mentally and in the heart cry, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me the sinner". It has already been stated that the name of God is Jesus Christ. The invocation of the divine name sanctifies man. When man is sanctified, the heavenly Father is glorified.

With this opportunity I would like to express the opinion that the "Jesus prayer", "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner",

is a summary of the Lord's Prayer. The invocation and the three first petitions are summarized in "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God", while the three last petitions are summarized in "have mercy on me the sinner".

In this way, the "Jesus prayer" expresses the spirit of the Lord's Prayer and so prepares the worshipper to say it with greater zeal and spiritual feeling.

THY KINGDOM COME

When God reigns in man, man is liberated, pacified, satisfied and sanctified. When God does not reign in man, man is exposed to the devil's tyranny which enslaves him to passions, to self-love and directs him to weariness, to emptiness, to boredom and loneliness, turning his life into hell.

The world today which denies the Kingdom of God is tormented by horrible, demonic situations, such as witchcraft, superstitions, drugs, terrorism, crime and the dissolution of the family.

The Lord teaches us to ask for His Kingdom to come. According to the holy Fathers, this Kingdom is the Grace of the Holy Spirit. Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite writes, "The Lord orders us to beg God to free us from the bitter tyranny of the Devil because human nature was voluntarily enslaved to the manslaughterer Devil. Otherwise, we will not be liberated, unless the Kingdom of God, that is to say the Holy Spirit, comes to us so as to expel from us the tyrant enemy and reign in us..." According to divine Maximus, for this reason, we must say, "Let your Holy Spirit come to us, so as to cleanse us totally in soul and in body". That is to say, let the Holy Spirit come to cleanse totally our body and soul, so that we may be a

residence suitable to welcome the Holy Trinity as a whole, so that God from now on reigns in us, in our hearts, as is written, "...the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17, 21) (ibid p. 35-36).

In the book of Genesis we see that during the creation of the world, darkness covered the abyss and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. The Holy Spirit banished darkness and chaos took shape. Darkness and chaos reign in man's inner self. Only when man allows the Holy Spirit to dwell within him, is he purified from passions, illuminated, and finds internal balance and unity. That is why in the prayer, "O heavenly King", addressed to the Holy Spirit, which is an extension of "Thy Kingdom come", we say, "Come and abide in us and cleanse us from all impurity and save, O Good One, our souls".

Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes on this subject, "So if we ask for the kingdom of God to dwell in us, let us beseech God, with all our strength for the following: To deliver me from decay, to liberate me from death, to loosen the chains of sin, to free me from the reign of death, to inactivate the tyrannical rule of malice. Furthermore, let me beseech God not to allow the enemy to defeat me and capture me through sin. Rather let Thy kingdom come, so that the passions may depart from me or even better, disappear, the passions that now dominate and rule" (At prayer, Homily III, ibid p. 69).

It is obvious from the above that the Kingdom of God is not an external arrangement of the world, but the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. This results in the transfiguration of the world through transfigured people.

For this reason, our Orthodox Church has never attempted to conquer the world, as Western Christianity has. Rather, She attempts to transfigure the world in Christ. Orthodox monasticism is not activistic (of actions) but hesychastic, of prayer and of contemplation, through which man is sanctified and transfigured into a new creation.

The partaking of the Saints in the Uncreated Light of the Holy Trinity is, according to Saint Gregory Palamas, a partaking in the Kingdom of God, in His glory and in His magnificence.

THY WILL BE DONE ON EARTH, AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

Man's selfish will separated him from God, exiled him from Paradise and caused all his misfortunes. If man does not renounce his selfish will and does not adopt the holy will of God, he cannot be cured of the serious illness of selfishness and egoism.

Christ, the New Adam, and the Theotokos, the New Eve, with their total obedience outbalanced Adam's and Eve's disobedience to the holy will of God.

Christ was obedient to the will of His Father to the point of death, to the point of death on a Cross. At Gethsemane, Christ in extreme anguish gave Himself totally over to the will of God the Father, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26, 39).

Thus, through His obedience, Christ opened up for us the path to God and became the spiritual head of the race of the obedient children of God.

Every Christian who abjures Satan with Holy Baptism and sides with Christ promises to come under Christ's obedience.

With this petition we ask for the Grace to carry out the will of God, on behalf of ourselves and

all people. We ask for the will of God to be done completely, as is done by the holy angels, who are totally obedient to God. Saint Chrysostom interprets, "Thus, render us men worthy to carry out Your will, not half-done but always completely, as you desire". And he adds, "And again He dictates to each one of us, who pray, to care for the welfare of the whole world. For He did not say thy will be done in me or in us but upon all the earth, so that deception disappears and truth is planted and all vice is uprooted and virtue returns again, so that neither heaven nor earth are different in this respect. For, if this could be done, He says, there will be no difference between heaven and earth, although they differ in their nature, since earth will have her own angels to show us (ibid. 674).

Saint Chrysostom preached and urged the Christians to live the perfect Christian life so that they experience the Kingdom of God before reaching eternal life. So that the earth becomes heaven.

Men keep God's commandments either from fear of going to hell or in order to receive reward from God or, still, out of clean and unselfish love for God. In the first case they behave as slaves, in the second as servants and in the third as sons. We must all aim for the last one. We must do the

divine will out of pure love of God, as His sons. This is a sign of perfection. This is what the holy angels in heaven do.

As long as man carries out his own will, he can not find true inner peace. When he performs God's will, he is reconciled with God and finds peace. This is the peace from on high, that we ask for in the Divine Liturgy.

According to the holy Fathers, God Himself is to be found in His commandments. For this reason whoever keeps God's commandments unites with God.

However, even when we keep all the commandments, we will still consider ourselves 'filthy slaves', according to the word of the Lord. This is because the Grace of God is that saves us and not our own good deeds. The pharisaical self-justification has no similarity to the humble, Orthodox Christian morals. As Saint Seraphim of Sarov taught, our good deeds are not only a presupposition in order for us to receive the Grace of God, but they are also fruit of the Grace of God. However, good deeds can never become the goal of Christian life. The goal is the acquisition of Divine Grace.

Keeping God's commandments, which in depth express the comprehensive virtue of love, directs us to true freedom, to the freedom of love that liberates man from egoism. Freedom of

that liberates man from egoism. Freedom of egoism is a pseudo-freedom. The Christians, by choosing to obey God, choose the freedom of love that presupposes the crucifixion and the sacrifice of our egoism.

It is what the holy Fathers, through their struggle and experience say, “Obedience is life, disobedience is death”.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD

According to Saint Chrysostom, as far as our life and our morals are concerned, the Lord orders us to ask for angelic conduct and to fulfil whatever the angels fulfil. However, since we are made of flesh, He has taught us to ask for our bodily needs, as well. This should be done by spiritual means. We should not ask for luxury and delight, but "our essential bread", the basic and necessary things. This is to be done 'today', without anxiety, "That our daily care does not exhaust us even more" (ibid p. 672).

According to the holy Fathers, with this petition we ask not only for material bread, but mostly the spiritual Bread, Christ. Christ is offered to us with His word, and with His Body and His Blood. This offering takes place in every Divine Liturgy.

In the first part of the divine Liturgy, the instructive, the word of God is offered through verses taken from the Old Testament in the Antiphona and is followed by the reading of the Epistle and the Gospel. On Mount Athos the Beatitudes are chanted as well.

In the second part of the Divine Liturgy, we partake in the sacrifice of Christ and we receive

His crucified and resurrected Body. That is why we recite the Lord's prayer before Holy Communion and after the recitation of, "And render us, O Master, worthy that we may boldly without condemnation dare to call upon You the heavenly God as Father, and to say...".

In this way this prayer is closely connected to the Holy Eucharist and leads us to a eucharistic use of this world. By asking God for everthing we need, we acknowledge Him as the only provider of everything good and we acknowledge all the gifts of life as His gifts.

This helps us to be humble, grateful and thankful towards God, "Let us give thanks unto the Lord", "It is meet and right", "For all these things we give thanks to You... for the seen and the unseen benefits... for all the things we know and do not know".

Furthermore, this helps us to offer to God His gifts in return, "Your Gifts, of what is Yours, do we offer to You, in all we do and for all Your blessings for ever".

Now we can behave accordingly towards God's gifts, towards people and towards things. Since they are God's gifts, we must not scorn them. In this way, we can make the correct eucharistic use of the world, avoiding the spiritually destructive abuse or excess. If we had adopted the eucharistic

way of life, we would respect the creation that surrounds us and we would not have ended with today's terrible ecological disaster.

Let us pay attention to the following: The temporary consuming way of life is totally opposed to the spirit of this petition. It is not eucharistic but uneucharistic. It is not brotherly but selfish and individualistic. It does not delight in austerity, the essential bread, but it pursues unreasonable extravagance and luxury. Nevertheless, we all know that our overconsuming society ultimately turns out to be our grave and leads us to many injustices and social evils.

It is also noteworthy that we ask for the essential bread not only for ourselves, but as in the previous petitions, for all of us. One can not forget his brethren when he asks God for material and spiritual goods.

Orthodox sociology, charity and brotherhood are based on the 'our' and the 'us' of this petition. This petition reminds us of the multiplication of the five loaves of bread and the two fish by the Lord in the desert, in order to satisfy the multitude's hunger. It also reminds us of the common ownership of goods by the first Christians of Jerusalem and of the monastic communities of our times.

Even the Orthodox missionary work is based on this principle. Is it possible not to care for and not to be interested in the forwarding of the heavenly Bread to those who starve spiritually?

AND FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES AS WE FORGIVE THOSE WHO TRESPASS AGAINST US

As long as man lives self-centredly, he can not forgive his fellow men. His offended ego does not allow him to. However, when man repents and decides to place God in the centre of his life, then he forgives those who distressed, harmed and were unjust to him.

We must put up a hard struggle in order to liberate ourselves from resentment, because egoism tyrannizes our soul. For this reason, the Lord taught us to seek forgiveness from God, on the condition that we forgive those who trespass against us.

According to Saint Chrysostom, the Lord could forgive us without demanding beforehand that we in turn forgive our fellow men, "However, in this way, He shows His charity, even more..., but he wants you to benefit from this, giving you very many opportunities of kindness and charity, opportunities to put out the beastly behaviour from you, quench anger and unite you to your member".

It is true that resentment and hostility alienate you from your brother who is a member of you, since both of you are members of Christ and

therefore, members of each other. With remission of sins and reconciliation, you are reassociated and joined with your own member. How can you rest when a member of you is separated from your body? Only if you are not a member of the Body of Christ or if you are a dead member of Him, will you not feel your brother as a member of you.

The Christian who lives God-centredly, lives following the example of the heavenly Father. Since God forgives, he also forgives. Otherwise, how could he ask God to forgive him, without forgiving the minor offences of his brethren? He would resemble the cunning servant in the well-known parable who would not forgive a small debt owed to him by a fellow servant, while the Merciful Lord had made him a present of his own, tremendous debt.

This petition helps us retain a humble spirit, because it reminds us not only of our personal sinfulness, but also of human nature's sinfulness. Saint Gregory of Nyssa, in reference to human nature's sinfulness, very precisely states:

"Let us count, beginning from here, the trespasses of man towards God.

First of all, man was guilty of punishment by God, because he estranged himself from his Creator and went over to the enemy, by running

away and revolting against his natural Lord.

Secondly, because he exchanged his independent freedom with the deadly slavery of sin and chose to be governed by the power of destruction, instead of remaining near God.

Is there a greater evil than not to see the beauty of the Creator, but instead, to turn one's face to the ugliness of sin?

What sort of punishment should be set for the contempt of the divine goods and preference for the lures used by the devil?

Also, who can enumerate man's myriad trespasses? The destruction of the image and the ruin of the seal, we received at our initial creation. The loss of the drachma and the departure from the paternal table. The addiction to the filthy life of the swine and the waste of the precious wealth and all the other similar trespasses we can find in the Holy Bible and think of by ourselves, who can enumerate them?

Since the human race is guilty of such trespasses against God and must serve punishment, for this reason, I think the Word (Logos) educates us with the words of the prayer. He instructs us not to show any boldness in our conversation with God, as if we had a clean conscience, even if someone is, as far as possible, free of human trespasses" (St. Gregory of Nyssa, At Prayer, Homily V, ibid p. 107).

AND LEAD US NOT IN TO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL

And do not allow us, O Lord, to fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

According to Saint Maximus, the temptations are of two kinds: those which bring pleasure and those which bring pain. The first ones are voluntary and give birth to the passions. The second ones are involuntary and banish the passions. We must avoid the voluntary ones. We must not seek the involuntary ones and must always loathe them, because we are weak and might submit to them. When they come, though, we must bear them with courage as 'purifiers' of the soul.

In reference to the subject of the painful temptations, Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite notes, "God, acting in sympathy towards our hardships and evil tendency, allows the temptations, which can sometimes be very horrible and awful, to come to us in various ways, so that we be humbled and obtain self-awareness, even though all these temptations seem useless to us. In this way, God shows at the same time His benevolence and His wisdom because we benefit even more from what seems to us more harmful, because we are humbled, which is what our soul needs more than anything else".

By teaching us not to pursue the temptations, says Saint John Chrysostom, the Lord educates us to be aware of our weakness and in this way He bridles the self-conceit, the pride. However, when temptations come against our will, then we must face them with bravery, "in order to show our bravery and our lack of vanity".

Saint John Chrysostom also notes that the Lord doesn't say 'from the evil ones', that is to say from evil people, but 'from the evil one', that is to say from the devil. The Lord does this to teach us not to lay the blame on and bear a grudge towards people who distress us, but to lay the blame on the devil who incites them. He calls the devil, evil, "Ordering us to fight against him without truce". Furthermore, he does this to show us that wickedness is not a natural condition, but the result of bad intention.

FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY FOR EVER AND EVER, AMEN.

It is natural that the Prayer ends with the glorification of God and not with the request to be delivered from the devil. The Almighty God, the King of kings and Lord of lords has the final word in this world and not the devil, who by God's concession seems to influence the strings of history. The devil may bring about disorder, he may temporarily prevail over the world with his cohorts, but in the end God's Will will be done.

The rule of the Antichrist is temporary. Christ is the eternal Lord and King. One is Holy, One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

For this reason and for this reason only, the glory belongs to the Trinitarian God.

Again, the golden mouth of the Church (St. Chrysostom) notes, "Since He led us into a state of anxiety with the recollection of the enemy and destroyed our inertness, He encourages us and reanimates our spirit, reminding us of the King, whose subjects we are. He reveals Himself stronger than anyone and says, "For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory". Therefore, since the

kingdom is His, no one should be afraid because no one can resist Him and share the power with Him" (St. John Chrysostom, ibid p. 683).

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As far as my weakness and the limited time have permited us, we have probed deeply into the divine words of the Lord's Prayer.

Our heart is full of thankfulness towards the benevolent Lord who has handed over to us this holy prayer as power, light and consolation in our life.

All the petitions of the Lord's Prayer help us liberate ourselves from our selfishness. They help us live not selfishly for ourselves, but for our God and our fellow-man. The more we rid ourselves of selfishness, the more God comes into us.

Allow me to say something bold, not from my personal experience, but from the experience of the Saints and from the experience of Mount Athos: If we totally get rid of our egoism and selfishness, then the whole God will come in us. Besides, the Lord Himself says so, "If someone loves me, he will keep my word, and my father will love him, and we will come and dwell in him". Then man can enjoy the most real joy and peace, the joy that the Lord promised to His disciples and that no one can take away from him.

It is sad that many people in our days do not say or do not want to say the Lord's prayer. We

are informed that many teachers, when the Lord's Prayer is recited at school, either do not go into the school courtyard to pray together with the students, or they stand with their hands behind their backs to show they are doing something they do not believe in.

Those who renounce Christ and His Prayer, consciously or unconsciously, those who live self-centredly and selfishly, say another prayer:

-They do not say, "Our Father which art in heaven", but they say, "Myself, I have you for god on the earth".

-They do not say, "Thy Kingdom come", but, "my Kingdom come".

-They do not say, "Thy will be done", but, "my will be done".

-They do not say, "Give us this day our daily bread", but, "I provide with extravagance and luxury material good for myself".

-They do not say, "And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us", but, "I ask no one to forgive me, as I forgive no one".

-They do not say, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil", but "I seek all the licit and illicit pleasures and hate everything painful".

-They do not say, "For Thine is the kingdom

and the power and the glory", but, "For mine is the kingdom and the power and the glory".

Not only those who deny Christ, but even we Christians, happen to have, from time to time, temptations and downfalls in this self-centred, individualistic and diabolic life.

This very self-centredness, though, is what makes our life today an impasse.

Our country's crisis in politics, in education, in inter-personal relationship, in the economy, I think is due to all this.

We have denied the spirit of Christ, the spirit of the Lord's Prayer.

I see no solution to this impasse, if the rulers and the ruled do not repent. No political party and no ideology can save us.

There will be a solution and a light, if we, the contemporary Orthodox people, desire to say again humbly and simply the "Lord's Prayer" and, even more, if we comply with the spirit of this prayer.

If the majority do not want to do this, let us struggle to do it ourselves, we, the faithful and churchgoers. The danger of being led astray by the heavy chains of atheist individualism that tighten around us is not small, and without realizing it we may substitute our love for God and for man with selfishness.

This is a great temptation for which we must

say, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory for ever and ever, amen”.

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